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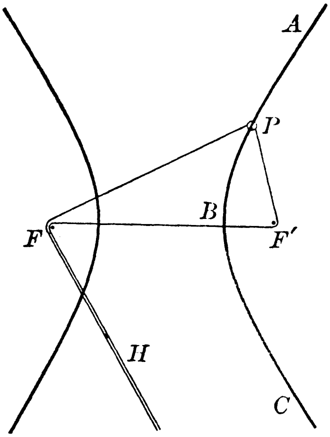
COMMUNICATION CONCERNING MR. RANSOM'S MECHANICAL CONSTRUCTION OF CONICS.

To the Editors of the Annals of Mathematics.

Gentlemen :— The following improvement on Mr. Ransom's "mechanical construction of confocal conics," was suggested to me by Mr. B. M. Kimball, a member of my Harvard Summer School class in analytic geometry, and may prove of interest to readers of the Annals. Mr. Kimball finds that two pegs, F and F', are sufficient as well for the hyperbola as for the ellipse, the string being placed around the pegs as indicated in the figure.



In the case of the hyperbola, the pencil is fastened to the string at P, so that it will not slip along the string; the loose ends of the string are held by the hand at H, and are drawn downward as P describes the arc AB. When the pencil has reached the position B we may lift it over the string FF' and continue along the arc BC, letting out slack from H; more accurate results will be obtained, however, if the string is first placed around the other side of the peg at F'. The exact position of the hand H is not important, provided both parts of the string always rest firmly against the peg F.

In the case of the ellipse, the point H is held fixed, and the pencil is allowed to slide along the string.

Very truly yours,

Edward V. Huntington.

Harvard University,
August, 1902.

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* See the last number of the Annals, p. 164.